

Subcommittee on Children and Families - Re-Authorization of the Community Services Block Grant Program

Bill Number: Oversight

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Witness:

E. Phillip McKain

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Testimony:

Good Afternoon. My name is Phillip McKain. I am the President and CEO of CTE, The Community Action Agency for the Communities of Stamford, Greenwich and Darien, Connecticut. I am also the President of the Connecticut Association for Community Action, the state association for the 12 Community Action Agencies of Connecticut. These 12 agencies serve all 169 towns and cities in the state.

For 2002, our agencies reported serving over 254,000 clients. Our clients include young children, the disabled, the elderly and poor and working poor individuals. Of those for whom information was available, the following outcomes were reported:

- 90% of families demonstrated an increase in skills and were strengthened through counseling, classes and other support services.
- 88% reduced or eliminated an emergency need, such as food, shelter, or home heating utility payments.
- 69% eliminated or reduced barriers to employment and self-sufficiency.
- 14,924 children and youth participated in services that supported their growth and development, such as Head Start, school readiness, and at-risk youth programs. In particular, new asset-development strategies are helping low-income working people stay off of welfare and move toward self-sufficiency:
- 62% demonstrated an increased ability to manage income to achieve self-sufficiency through various financial literacy programs.
- 55% increased their earned income from the previous year.

- 11 CAAs operate Individual Development Account programs. This long-term program will eventually help 230 clients purchase their first home, attend college or capitalize a small business.

Beyond these examples of the impact CSBG funding has made on the lives of individuals and families, I am also here today to testify on the value of CSBG in Connecticut in bringing about change in state government and in local communities to address the needs of working low-income families and communities.

On the state level the 12 CSBG funded Community Action Agencies have partnered with the Connecticut Department of Social Services and Infoline, a United Way funded statewide information and referral system, to change the social service delivery system for DSS Human Services Infrastructure. For years Connecticut state government's social services system was fragmented, creating confusion and duplication for Connecticut low-

income families. In an effort to change this system, the CAAs met with the Commissioner of Social Services for the State and the Governor's Office of Policy and Management. We proposed a new service delivery system to create an automated "one stop" approach to human service delivery which will streamline and integrate intake and assessment procedure, state and federal program eligibility screening, information and referral, and client outcome measurements for Connecticut's low-income residents. "Connecticut CAA Self-Sufficiency Centers" will build upon our existing Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system and software being implemented through the state association.

In a letter dated June 30, 2003 to Connecticut's Senator Dodd regarding this innovative partnership and the value of CSBG, the Commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Social Services, Patricia Wilson-Coker, stated that, "this management innovation is so impressive that I am using the Connecticut Community Action Network and the ROMA model as a new paradigm to support Connecticut's Human Service Infrastructure." I am submitting the Commissioner's letter for inclusion in the Committee's record. As a prelude to this new system, the DSS recently turned to the Community Action Network to provide assistance to disabled clients who needed help in completing DSS applications and locating needed services. This would not have been possible without the core funding that CSBG provides.

The Self-Sufficiency One Stop is not a program. It is not a "silo." It is a "funnel" that will guide clients through the complex service system and be a more effective approach to providing service. It will ensure the most cost-effective use of taxpayer dollars and provide better customer service. Additionally, Self-Sufficiency Centers will:

- Create a more cost-efficient service delivery system and eliminate duplicative efforts in intake, referrals, and assessment.

- Provide low-income people a "one-stop" system of comprehensive intake and assessment services that will improve client outcomes, and

- Provide better client outcome data reports that cuts across state and federally funded programs and demonstrate the value of integrating diverse funding streams at the local level.

The Connecticut Community Action network has utilized CSBG funding to provide leadership in identifying and solving needs that improve the life chances of low-income working families.

- In Stamford, a high cost-of-living, affluent community with pockets of extreme poverty, the Community Action Agency was asked to form an Affordable Housing Collaborative to help put affordable housing on the policy-making agenda for the city. We mobilized business leaders, labor representatives, faith leaders, non-profit and private housing developers, public officials, and community advocates, to put housing on the agenda of the city government. At our prompting, the Mayor established a Task Force which recommended zoning regulation changes to facilitate the production of affordable housing. Stamford now has incentives and regulations that will produce affordable units for low- to moderate-income workers who are the lifeblood of a sustainable community.

- The Community Renewal Team leveraged private and public donors to create a

Homeowner Assistance Center in Hartford. This center provides holistic services to help low-income working people purchase and rehabilitate houses, enhance their financial literacy skills, and improve their likelihood of long-term ownership, thereby stabilizing neighborhoods.

- The Human Resources Agency of New Britain's supports the East Side Community Action neighborhood group. This association has organized community residents to form five block watches; petitioned the city to remove blighted buildings; organized ongoing meetings with city officials to improve neighborhoods through crime reduction and the availability of services such as grocery stores; and successfully worked with the New Britain Common Council to pass a resolution establishing the East Side as a Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ).

- The Bristol Community Organization uses CSBG funds to provide comprehensive services for elderly clients, including transportation, that keeps them living independently and out of expensive nursing homes.

These are but a sampling of the many economic development and community improvement efforts going on in Connecticut through the work of Community Action Agencies and CSBG funding.

The state of Connecticut turned to CAAs because we had a system supported by a flexible and non-categorical funding base that can respond to statewide issues. Local communities turn to CAAs because we have the history of trust, commitment to the poor, and community partnership to bring about community change. Individuals and families turn to CAAs because they know that they can get a hand up to improve and change their life chances. The Community Services Block grant is that one unique federal funding mechanism that has made these changes happen.

I urge your continued support and the reauthorization of the Community Service Block Grant. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

#### APPENDIX TO E. PHILLIP McKAIN'S TESTIMONY

##### Innovative Strategies to Support People

##### Moving Toward Self-Sufficiency

- Individual Development Accounts: Eleven CT CAAs operate IDA programs. The federal IDA program provides no funds for case management, yet because of CSBG, our agencies can integrate IDA services into our existing case management structure. This long-term program will help 230 clients purchase their first home, attend college or capitalize a small business. To date, eight (8) have used their savings towards post-secondary education, eight (8) towards small businesses capitalization, and twelve (12) towards home ownership.

- Support for Low-Income Working People: Our agencies are adding programs and supports to help people manage their income better, to reduce debt, repair credit and save money.

- o 1,834 of 2,954 clients or 62% Demonstrated Increased Ability to Manage Income to Achieve Self-Sufficiency through various financial literacy programs.

- o Four agencies operated Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Centers that helped low-

income working families and individuals file their taxes and apply for Earned Income and Child Tax Credits. Over \$1 million in refunds were provided through these efforts.

- **Non-Custodial Fathers:** A number of our agencies provide support to help non-custodial fathers get back on their feet, reintegrate with their families and begin providing child support. A program at Action for Bridgeport Community Development, works with a sheet-metal union to provide job training and better employment opportunities. By increasing income fathers are better able to pay child support and maintain relationships with their children. They also receive assistance on resolving legal issues, parenting skills and establishing relationships with their children.

#### Strategies That Are Improving Low-Income Communities and Supporting Economic Development

- **Community Renewal Team:** CRT developed the Homeownership Assistance Center with private and public dollars. The Center establishes a one-stop housing resource center that will provide a comprehensive set of homeowner services to low- and moderate-income households. The program joins homeownership, weatherization, and energy efficiency services to Hartford families and individuals. It emphasizes asset building by encouraging low- and moderate-income households to purchase new homes or rehabilitate currently owned ones, and also provides financial literacy counseling, mortgage application assistance, home improvement assistance, assistance with dealing with contractors, post-improvement audits, social service intakes to determine eligibility for other social service programs. In addition to funding from the Ford Foundation, CRT has established partnerships with Fannie Mae, Northeast Utilities, the Housing Education Resource Center, the City of Hartford, and the Connecticut Housing Finance Association. This collaborative approach allows the Center to provide numerous services to its clients that CRT is unable to provide on its own.

- **New Opportunities in Waterbury** uses CSBG funds to support five neighborhood centers, a transitional housing program, and three youth centers. The Neighborhood Youth Center in the Brooklyn Neighborhood of Waterbury provides activities (educational and recreational) and family support (case management) to at-risk youth. By engaging youth in “after-school: hours and during school breaks, the program hopes to minimize their exposure to crime and drug related influences.

- **Human Resources Agency of New Britain** uses CSBG funds to provide coordinated, comprehensive services, maintain over 35 community partnerships, and leverage funding for community improvement efforts. One such partnership is with East Side Community Action, a neighborhood group of East Side residents of New Britain. Over 3000 East Side families were contacted and they identified a range of problems to address: Housing, Public Safety and Economic Development. The committees are working on reducing or eliminating many problems including blighted housing, crime, and the absence of a grocery store on the East Side. Some of East Side Community Action’s accomplishments are:

- o Public Safety Committee members have formed five Block Watches and a task force investigating the proposed Power Plant.

- o The Housing Committee has sent letters to the owners of blighted housing and is

following up with phone calls.

- o City employees from various departments have attended committee meetings to talk with residents and answer their questions on a number of topics. As a result, East Side residents readily call the city to address problems in their neighborhoods such as drug dealing, speeding cars, the need for stop signs, problems with trash removal, and blighted housing.

- o In April 2002, the New Britain Common Council passed a resolution establishing the East Side as a Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ).

- The Bristol Community Organization uses CSBG funds to provide comprehensive services for elderly clients, including transportation, that keeps them living independently and out of expensive nursing homes.